Memo for Digital Tours

Smithsonian Institute

To: Smithsonian Project Committee

From: Krissa Stewart

CC:

Date: 2/2/2021

Re: Digital Tours Project

Background

As one of the most well-known museums in the world, the Smithsonian sees an exceptionally large number of guests each year. While 2020's stats are much lower due to closures and travel restrictions, we can look at the numbers from 2019 and 2018 to see how many guests we have during a regular year. In 2018, a total of 28.5 million guests visited our museums, in 2019, that total was 22.1 million. These numbers are not exact of course, since we do not sell tickets, and thus rely on the counts made by security guards at the entrances. With so many annual guests, why do we need to start a new program to draw more people in, then?

To put it simply, there are Millions of Americans who may wish to visit our museums but will never have the opportunity. All across the country, you will meet people who have never had the money to leave their state, much less buy a ticket to come to DC to see our museums. By placing some of our exhibits into an interactable digital format, such as streaming, we are meeting our mission to educate and inform on a much larger scale than would have been possible just fifteen years ago. Why not take advantage of this situation.

Proposal

I am proposing a new way of sharing our collection with the population using online streaming platforms to spread our collections to interested parties who otherwise may never see them. This is a rather simple way of sharing our collections and exhibits, one that hundreds of influencers do everyday to interact with their fans and watchers. Why should we not do the same.

The process itself would be quite simple. Every month we would focus on a new exhibit, this way there would be plenty of time for people to view a single exhibit, as well as a regular changing of exhibits so people could experience different collections and museums.

This also would not require the hiring on new staff. Rather than having one of our tour guides lead in person tours, we could set up a rotation in which a single tour guide could spend the day doing virtual tours instead. With the addition of a worker to man the camera, these videos could be streamed in real time to give the experience of a real tour within the museum. Every tour could end with a question-and-answer session. Questions from the audience can be saved till the end of a tour, but they can also be placed in the streaming chat box, where the tour guide can easily read them during the question-and-answer session.

We could also stop these from getting out of hand by putting a cap on the amount of the people that can sign up for a single tour slot. This way our tour guide is not overwhelmed by questions from their audience. We could also offer a donation through the stream, where people could donate money electronically for this program.

The only thing we would have to add in terms of equipment would be cameras. These do not even have to necessarily be expensive, there are a lot of cameras that can be bought for midrange prices and do the job quite well.

Conclusion

By bringing regular online tours into our options, we can spread knowledge and information to more people than ever before. People who otherwise could never get to the Smithsonian. This can be accomplished with minimal changes to staff and do a lot of good for the public and our organization.